

[image]

## Praise for How Full Is Your Bucket?

"In this brief but significant book, the authors, a grandfather-grandson team, explore how using positive psychology in everyday interactions can dramatically change our lives."

- Publishers Weekly

"A well-researched, strong, and compelling case for improving selfesteem, better relationships, and health ... this book is a short, sharp, 'how-to' guide."

- People Management magazine

"Clifton and Rath paint a compelling picture of the good things that happen when people are encouraged, recognized, and praised regularly, as well as the emotional, mental, and sometimes even physical devastation that can occur in the absence of such positive encounters ... Leaders who want to eliminate or avoid this kind of destruction should make How Full-Is Your Bucket? required reading for themselves and their people."

- John C. Maxwell's Leadership Wired

"Useful anecdotes that managers in particular should pay attention to."

-The San Francisco Chronicle

"A slim, simple, upbeat volume that manages to be inspirational without preaching (or inducing nausea)."

- The Miami Herald

"Wow! This little book is a treasure. It is chock full of wisdom, inspiration, and practical advice, rooted in solid research. It will change the way you look at your life, your work, and the world."

- Martin Walsh

Executive Director, Society for Human Resource

Management (SHRM) Foundation

"Tom Rath and Don Clifton have nailed it. Their positive strategies are

immensely powerful."

- Michael W. Morrison, Ph.D.

Dean, University of Toyota

"The world would be a better place if EVERYONE read it."

- James C. Wright

Former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

"Powerful, captivating, and easy to read. This book's heartwarming message has a spiritual quality, yet it is grounded in decades of research."

- Lea E. Williams, Ed.D.

Executive Director, National African-American

Women's Leadership Institute, Inc.

"I loved reading this book and highly recommend it. I'm buying copies for those I love and care about the most."

- Paul Higham

Former Chief Marketing Officer, Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.

"A powerful experience for every reader and an invaluable tool for energizing every enterprise."

- William Robertson

Chairman, Weston Solutions, Inc.

"If there were a Nobel Prize for building a quality individual, this book deserves it."

- Mike Johanns

Governor, State of Nebraska

"This book reaffirms the value of caring and compassionate relationships. Tom Rath and Don Clifton have created simple, but powerful, strategies for transforming the business of work and finding the beauty in life."

- N. Joyce Payne

Founder, Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund

"The book is a quick and memorable read. It should be part of the core curriculum for any corporation trying to build a positive culture."

- Val J. Halamandaris

President, National Association for Home Care

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-In memory of my grandfather, coauthor, and  
mentor, Don Clon (1924-2003)

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# Preface to the Anniversary Edition

In the five years since the publication of *How Full is Your Bucket?*, I have heard from thousands of readers. Some have passed along their best strategies for boosting well-being, while others have shared their life stories. The one common thread is that people have learned to keep the "bucket" metaphor top of mind, and that has had a lasting impact on their lives, work, and closest relationships.

Unfortunately, I have also heard from hundreds of readers who realized they were in an environment in which their bucket was constantly being emptied. In some cases, people have been in these destructive environments and relationships for years. And because the problem was more of an accumulation of negative moments than a single incident, there was no obvious breaking point that caused them to leave that environment. Yet when they considered the cumulative effect of thousands of negative daily interactions, these readers came to realize how much damage had been done.

This constant negativity, or what our research teams at Gallup call active disengagement, runs rampant in workplaces around the world. This is not a problem that's isolated to just a few individuals. Active disengagement spreads rapidly. One negative person can quickly bring down the well-being of colleagues, customers, friends, and family members. (On a more positive but related note, a 2008 study illustrated how one person's happiness continues to have a significant impact at a third degree of separation.) It is likely that a disengaging work environment is not just bad for you and your work team's productivity, but it also could have a negative impact on the well-being of your friends and family members.

Over the past five years, many readers have asked what they should do about a colleague who is perpetually disengaged. My best advice has always been to try and make the situation better, but if that fails, then to avoid the problematic person as much as possible. My assumption was that some people could not help but be disengaged in their jobs. As it turned out, my assumption was wrong. A few years ago, Gallup conducted a study that suggests otherwise.

In that study, which has now been replicated multiple times, we

conducted a randomized survey with more than a thousand employees  
- asking them where their manager focused the most time and attention:

- a) On employees' strengths
- b) On employees' weaknesses
- c) Neither of the above; the manager ignored employees

We found that one person, specifically the manager in this context, can eliminate almost all of the active disengagement in a workplace if he or she primarily focuses on an employee's strengths. When people reported that their manager did not focus on their strengths or their weaknesses (the manager ignored employees), there was a 40% chance of them being actively disengaged on the job. If their manager focused primarily on weaknesses (and presumably was at least paying attention), things actually got better, and there was only a 22% chance of them being disengaged. But when a manager primarily focused on an employee's strengths, there was just a 1% chance of that employee being very negative or actively disengaged on the job.

As you can see from the results of this study, it appears that disengagement is a curable problem. And it is a challenge that is within our own control. If we put enough time into focusing on the strengths of the people around us every day, it changes the entire environment.

As you will learn in the pages that follow, it all starts with a focus on what is right in your interactions with other people. And every moment matters.

- Tom Rath

February 2009

# Introduction

In the early 1950s, my grandfather, Don Clifton, was teaching psychology at the University of Nebraska when he noticed a major problem: The field of psychology was based almost entirely on the study of what is wrong with people.

He began to wonder if it would be more important to study what is right with people.

So, for the next five decades, Don and his colleagues conducted millions of interviews, focusing on the positive instead of the negative.

Early in his research, Don discovered that our lives are shaped by our interactions with others. Whether we have a long conversation with a friend or simply place an order at a restaurant, every interaction makes a difference. The results of our encounters are rarely neutral; they are almost always positive or negative. And although we take these interactions for granted, they accumulate and profoundly affect our lives.

In 2002, Don's pioneering work was recognized by the American Psychological Association, which cited him as the Father of Strengths Psychology. That same year, Don learned that an aggressive and terminal cancer had spread throughout his body. Knowing his time was limited, he spent his final months doing what he did best and what people who knew him well would have expected: He helped others focus on the positive.

Although Don had already written several books, including the bestseller *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, he asked me to join him in writing one last book - one based on a theory he created in the 1960s. People had been asking Don to write this book for decades as a result of the theory's popularity. Over the past 40 years, more than 5,000 organizations and 1 million people have applied this theory. And people always passed it along to friends, colleagues, and loved ones.

Based on a simple metaphor of a dipper and a bucket, Don's theory carried profound implications and simplified his life's work for others. So in his final months, Don and I worked night and day to assemble the most compelling discoveries he had gathered over half a century of work. Although Don was undergoing chemotherapy and radiation,

we continued to work on this book whenever he had the energy - which was the majority of the time.

We sat in his study for hours, reviewing the research, statistics, and stories we thought you would find compelling. As Don's health deteriorated, I read sections to him and took notes on his feedback. He reviewed every section, wanting each story and insight to resonate with you.

For my part, I was honored to be Don's partner in creating this book. He was my mentor, teacher, role model, and friend. We were exceptionally close, and I cherished the time we had together. I was always motivated and inspired by his vision. And Don knew that I had been touched deeply by this theory throughout my life. As we will describe in Chapter Four, applying Don's Theory of the Dipper and the Bucket energized and possibly saved me in my own battles with cancer.

In hindsight, I think this project also gave Don additional energy in the final stages of his fight with cancer. He had spent his life trying to make the world a better place - one person at a time - and he understood that completing this book would make a difference. We finished our first draft of this book just weeks before his death in September 2003.

Over the 79 years of Don's life, he touched millions of individual lives through his books, teaching, and the global business he built. Don reached so many people as a result of his unwavering belief in helping individuals and organizations focus on what is right.

As you read this book, I hope that you will discover the power of helping others focus on what's right in their lives.

-Tom Rath

March 2004

## The Theory of the Dipper and the Bucket

Each of us has an invisible bucket. It is constantly emptied or filled, depending on what others say or do to us. When our bucket is full, we feel great. When it's empty, we feel awful.

Each of us also has an invisible dipper. When we use that dipper to fill



other people's buckets - by saying or doing things to increase their positive emotions - we also fill our own bucket. But when we use that dipper to dip from others' buckets - by saying or doing things that decrease their positive emotions - we diminish ourselves.

Like the cup that runneth over, a full bucket gives us a positive outlook and renewed energy. Every drop in that bucket makes us stronger and more optimistic.

But an empty bucket poisons our outlook, saps our energy, and undermines our will. That's why every time someone dips from our bucket, it hurts us.

So we face a choice every moment of every day: We can fill one another's buckets, or we can dip from them. It's an important choice - one that profoundly influences our relationships, productivity, health, and happiness.

# CHAPTER ONE

# Negativity Kills

When we started writing this book, the first question I asked my grandfather was: "Why did you begin studying what is right with people?" Don answered my question without a moment's hesitation - his review of one specific case study had altered the entire focus of his career and life. And this study was about as far as possible from a positive or inspiring story:

Following the Korean War, Major (Dr.) William E. Mayer, who would later become the U.S. Army's chief psychiatrist, studied 1,000 American prisoners of war who had been detained in a North Korean camp. He was particularly interested in examining one of the most extreme and perversely effective cases of psychological warfare on record - one that had a devastating impact on its subjects.

American soldiers had been detained in camps that were not considered especially cruel or unusual by conventional standards. The captive soldiers had adequate food, water, and shelter. They weren't subjected to common physical torture tactics of the time such as having bamboo shoots driven under their fingernails. In fact, fewer cases of physical abuse were reported in the North Korean POW camps than in prison camps from any other major military conflict throughout history.

Why, then, did so many American soldiers die in these camps? They weren't hemmed in with barbed wire. Armed guards didn't surround the camps. Yet no soldier ever tried to escape. Furthermore, these men regularly broke rank and turned against each other, sometimes forming close relationships with their North Korean captors.

When the survivors were released to a Red Cross group in Japan, they were given the chance to phone loved ones to let them know they were alive. Very few bothered to make the call.

Upon returning home, the soldiers maintained no friendships or relationships with each other. Mayer described each man as being in a mental "solitary confinement cell ... without any steel or concrete."

Mayer had discovered a new disease in the POW camps - a disease of extreme hopelessness. It was not uncommon for a soldier to wander into his hut and look despairingly about, deciding there was no use in

trying to participate in his own survival. He would go into a corner alone, sit down, and pull a blanket over his head. And he would be dead within two days.

the soldiers actually called it "give up-itis." The doctors labeled it "mirasmus," meaning, in Mayer's words, "a lack of resistance, a passivity." If the soldiers had been hit, spat upon, or slapped, they would have become angry. Their anger would have given them the motivation to survive. But in the absence of motivation, they simply died, even though there was no medical justification for their deaths.

Despite relatively minimal physical torture, "mirasmus" raised the overall death rate in the North Korean POW camps to an incredible 38% - the highest POW death rate in U.S. military history. Even more astounding was that half of these soldiers died simply because they had given up. They had completely surrendered, both mentally and physically.

How could this have happened? The answers were found in the extreme mental tactics that the North Korean captors used. They employed what Mayer described as the "ultimate weapon" of war.

### The "Ultimate Weapon"

Mayer reported that the North Koreans' objective was to "deny men the emotional support that comes from interpersonal relationships." To do this, the captors used four primary tactics:

Relentless negativity resulted in a 38% Pow death rate - the highest in U. S. military history

- ❖ informing
- ❖ self-criticism
- ❖ breaking loyalty to leadership and country
- ❖ withholding all positive emotional support

To encourage informing, the North Koreans gave prisoners rewards such as cigarettes when they snitched on one another. But neither the offender nor the soldier reporting the violation was punished - the captors encouraged this practice for a different reason. Their intent was to break relationships and turn the men against each other. The

captors understood that the soldiers could actually harm each other if they were encouraged to dip from their comrades' buckets every day.

To promote self-criticism, the captors gathered groups of 10 or 12 soldiers and employed what Mayer described as "a corruption of group psychotherapy." In these sessions, each man was required to stand up in front of the group and confess all the bad things he had done - as well as all the good things he could have done but failed to do.

The most important part of this tactic was that the soldiers were not "confessing" to the North Koreans, but to their own peers. By subtly eroding the caring, trust, respect, and social acceptance among the American soldiers, the North Koreans created an environment in which buckets of goodwill were constantly and ruthlessly drained.

the third major tactic that the captors employed was breaking loyalty to leadership and country. The primary way they did this was by slowly and relentlessly undermining a soldier's allegiance to his superiors.

the consequences were ghastly. In one case, a colonel instructed one of his men not to drink the water from a rice paddy field because he knew the organisms in the water might kill him. The soldier looked at his colonel and remarked, "Buddy, you ain't no colonel anymore; you're just a lousy prisoner like me. You take care of yourself, and I'll take care of me." The soldier died of dysentery a few days later.

In another case, 40 men stood by as three of their extremely ill fellow soldiers were thrown out of their mud hut by a comrade and left to die in the elements. Why did their fellow soldiers do nothing to help them? Because it "wasn't their job." The relationships had been broken; the soldiers simply didn't care about each other anymore.

But the tactic of withholding all positive emotional support while inundating soldiers with negative emotions was perhaps bucket dipping in its purest and most malicious form. If a soldier received a supportive letter from home, the captors withheld it. All negative letters, however - such as those telling of a relative passing away, or ones in which a wife wrote that she had given up on her husband's return and was going to remarry - were delivered to soldiers immediately.

the captors would even deliver overdue bills from collection agencies back home - within less than two weeks of the original postmark. The

effects were devastating: the soldiers had nothing to live for and lost basic belief in themselves and their loved ones, not to mention God and country. Mayer said that the North Koreans had put the American soldiers "into a kind of emotional and psychological isolation, the likes of which we had never seen."

## Studying Positive Emotions

Moved by this story of psychological torture and deprivation - and perhaps inspired by the hope that these soldiers had not suffered or died in vain - Don Clifton and his colleagues decided to study the flip side of this horrific equation. They wondered: If people can be literally destroyed by unrelenting negative reinforcement, can they be uplifted and inspired to a greater degree by similar levels of positive reinforcement? In essence, they asked:

Can positive emotions have an even stronger impact than negative emotions?

# CHAPTER TWO

# Positivity, Negativity, and Productivity

Most of us will never endure the kind of psychological torture that the American POWs suffered during the Korean War. Yet we all experience positive and negative interactions every day that influence how we feel and behave. Even though these interactions are commonplace and often undramatic, they still matter. It's true that most of our negative experiences will not kill us, yet they can slowly but surely erode our well-being and productivity. Fortunately, positive experiences or "bucket filling" can be even more powerful.

## Bucket Filling in Organizations

Although bucket filling goes far beyond the concepts of recognition and praise, these are two critical components for creating positive emotions in organizations. In fact, we have surveyed more than 15 million employees worldwide on this topic. Our analysis found that individuals who receive regular recognition and praise:

The #1 reason people leave their jobs:

They don't feel appreciated

- ❖ increase their individual productivity
- ❖ increase engagement among their colleagues
- ❖ are more likely to stay with their organization
- ❖ receive higher loyalty and satisfaction scores from customers

have better safety records and fewer accidents on the • job

To put this in perspective, think about the greatest recognition you have ever received in the workplace. Chances are, it caused you to feel better about your organization and, in turn, become more productive. Great recognition and praise can immediately transform a workplace. And just one person can infuse positive emotions into an entire group by filling buckets more frequently. Studies show that organizational leaders who share positive emotions have workgroups with a more



positive mood, enhanced job satisfaction, greater engagement, and improved group performance.

One CEO we know, Ken, claims that bucket filling is his "secret weapon" as a leader. He has developed very targeted ways to increase positive emotions in the large organization that he runs. In Ken's frequent travels around the world, he always stops by his company's local offices. And he doesn't visit to hover over his employees or just to meet with upper management. Instead, his primary intent is to energize the people in each workplace.

Bad bosses could increase the risk of stroke by 33%

Before arriving, Ken recalls successes and achievements he has heard over the past few months involving people in that office. As soon as he arrives, Ken casually visits with these individuals and congratulates them. He may offer kudos to an employee who recently got married or had a child or praise someone who gave a great presentation. One of his favorite lines is: "I've been hearing a lot of good talk behind your back." The most enjoyable part for Ken is to "watch the energy move through the network" once he sets it in motion. He realized that he could light up an entire workplace with a few brief - but very energizing - conversations.

"I discovered that bucket filling is an extraordinarily powerful leadership strategy," Ken says. As a result of this approach, thousands look to him for motivation and guidance.

### Killing Productivity

Of course, there is a flip side. Right now, the majority of us don't give or receive anywhere near the amount of praise that we should. As a result, we're much less productive, and in many cases, completely disengaged in our jobs. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, the number-one reason people leave their jobs is because they "do not feel appreciated. "

The cost of disengagement: \$250-\$300 billion per year

But the problem doesn't stop there.

One study of healthcare workers found that when employees were

working for a boss they disliked, they had significantly higher blood pressure. According to British scientist George Fieldman, this boss-induced hypertension could increase the risk of coronary heart disease by one-sixth and the risk of stroke by one-third.

"There was both a statistically and clinically significant elevation during the time people had the boss they didn't like," says Fieldman, a psychologist and psychotherapist. "People who work with bosses they've really hated constantly for years would probably be quite vulnerable to heart disease because of the elevation of blood pressure in the long-term."

Where productivity is concerned, it would be better for organizations if people who are overly negative stayed home. When they do show up for work, they are counterproductive. We all know these types of people. They walk around the office with glazed looks or move from cubicle to cubicle stirring up trouble with whining, complaining, and even paranoia.

Our estimates suggest that there are more than 22 million workers - in the United States alone - who are extremely negative or "actively disengaged." This rampant negativity is not only disheartening, it's expensive: It costs the U.S. economy between \$250 and \$300 billion every year in lost productivity alone. When you add workplace injury, illness, turnover, absences, and fraud, the cost could surpass \$1 trillion per year, or nearly 10% of the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP). These costs are not specific to the United States; they exist to varying degrees in every country, industry, and organization we have studied.

And our figures are conservative. To estimate costs accurately, we only accounted for the direct impact that actively disengaged employees have at work. We quantified the productivity - or lack thereof - occurring in each person's own workspace. In analyzing the data, we had to assume that each disengaged employee simply sat in his or her cubicle and didn't wreak havoc elsewhere - an unlikely assumption, of course. Most disengaged employees do plenty of things each day that bring others down with their own sinking ship.

### Spiraling Downward

To bring these numbers to life, here's an example of the effect that just a small dose of negativity had on one employee. Does Laura's story sound familiar to you?

There I was, standing at the front of the room, ready to get into the best part of my presentation. I had stayed up late the last two nights preparing. I had a great deal of knowledge and passion on this topic and wanted everything to be perfect. And I really hoped to impress my boss and colleagues. Everything was going well as I flipped through the first few slides. Then, a sudden technology glitch gave everyone a chance to start talking for a few minutes.

I overheard Mike whispering to Beth that it looked like I had been out late last night. I wanted to jump across the table and strangle him. Did I really look that bad? I tried to remain composed, but I was shaken.

When my presentation was back up, it was time to get everyone focused again and proceed. As I tried desperately to regain everyone's attention, my insecurities grew. Were my first few points so boring that they were dreading the next part, or did I look so bad that it was undermining my credibility?

Finally, my boss realized that I was about to have a breakdown and refocused everyone's attention. Unfortunately, he did it by saying, "Laura does not look very happy with us; maybe we should pay attention now." Ouch! Sometimes I can't believe the things people say out loud. Every ounce of confidence I had mustered to give this presentation was wiped out. Things went downhill after that.

A study found that negative employees can scare off every customer they speak with - for good

We have all experienced situations when it seems like nothing will go right no matter what you say or do. Maybe you feel like everyone is out to get you, and you even start to fixate on negative things about yourself. Spiraling downward isn't hard to do when your bucket is being emptied.

Not only do you feel down, but you are less productive because of it, and you bring others down with you by reactively dipping from their buckets. When you interact with people on these days, they quickly sense and are affected by the negativity you radiate. It's not easy to hide - in fact, it's highly contagious. It is possible for just one or two people to poison an entire workplace.

Scaring Off Customers

Not surprisingly, workgroups drained by excessive bucket dipping aren't only less productive and less profitable, they also have higher turnover, more accidents on the job, and lower customer satisfaction, innovation, and quality scores.

And negative employees scare off customers. Think about the last time you called a customer service line and were treated poorly. After this experience, you might have said to yourself, "I am never doing business with that company again." If you were really angry, you might have told others about your experience and recommended that they stop doing business with the company as well. This is the damage one negative employee can inflict on any business.

65% of Americans received no recognition in the workplace last year

We investigated the impact that a single employee can have on customers by studying 4,583 call center representatives from a major telecommunications company. We discovered three service representatives who scared off every single customer they spoke with in a given day - and those customers did not return. It is a serious problem when a company's employees are dipping from customers' buckets. The company would have been better off paying those three representatives to stay home.

Fortunately, this study also identified seven service reps who retained and engaged every single customer with whom they spoke. Maybe you've been lucky enough to talk with a rep like this - one who listened to your problem, made sure you understood that you were heard, took care of your issues promptly, and left you feeling like he or she really cared about you as a person. Did you want to tell others about this firstclass service? And are you still a customer today?

## The Recognition Gap

Managers, take note: Praise is rare in most workplaces. One poll found that an astounding 65% of Americans reported receiving no recognition for good work in the past year. And we have yet to find anyone who reports suffering from overrecognition. No wonder so many employees are disengaged. Although we need and want recognition and praise, the fact is, we don't get enough - and organizations suffer because of it.

Most of the time, organizations begin formal recognition programs

because someone in upper management has decided that monthly or quarterly awards ceremonies will help raise employee morale. Sounds good, right? What happens is the old reliable "Employee of the Month" program.

For the first few months, the program might actually work. there are usually at least a couple of people who have been top performers for a long time and deserve more recognition. these stars are appropriately showered with public praise.

But after a while, management struggles with the inevitable question: Who should be the next Employee of the Month? Once the executives reach a compromise, a lucky manager must stand in front of the room and say a bunch of nice - and often insincere - things about the recipient. The whole exercise ends up feeling like a sham to both the "winner" and the presenter.

Eventually, everyone - regardless of merit - gets named Employee of the Month. All their smiling photographs appear on a board in the reception area.

But the whole thing is gratuitous, and everyone knows it. The one who feels the worst, of course, is the employee who receives this recognition last. Why wouldn't he? Management waited months, or maybe more than a year, to praise his "great work," which probably feels about as good as being picked last for a team in gym class.

Of course, some organizations do provide meaningful, deserved, and individualized recognition. (In Chapter Six, we provide suggestions on how your organization can do just that.)

Sincere and meaningful bucket filling increases the morale of any organization. Managers and employees who actively spread positive emotions, even in small doses, will see the difference immediately. And creating that difference can be inexpensive - or even free. All it takes is a little initiative.

# CHAPTER THREE

# Every Moment Matters

Usually, we don't stop to consider the impact of brief interactions. But we experience literally hundreds of potential turning points in a given day, as illustrated by Tammy, a single mother with three children.

My day starts with a typical rush. As I am trying to get ready for work, the kids are clamoring for breakfast. Although my eight-year-old and eleven year-old are content with cereal, my six-year-old is demanding peanut butter and banana on toast. Eventually, I give in and make one piece as requested, and we sit down for a quick meal. After a single bite, my six-year-old drops her breakfast on the floor. I watch in what feels like slow motion as it lands - chunky peanut butter side down. Her brother blurts out, "You made a mess!" Then her older sister says, "You're supposed to eat it, you dummy!" And I chime in too and tell her something she already knows - that she really should be careful next time.

Consider how it felt to be the six-year-old at that moment. What if Tammy had quickly hit "pause" in her mind and given her daughter some positive encouragement instead of piling on and pointing out her mishap? Tammy's day continues:

I finally get everyone out the door and the kids to school -just in time. Then, as I am driving into the lot at work, I thought I had finally caught a break. For the first time in recent memory, there is an open parking spot in the front row. So, I speed up a little to make sure I beat any other parking lot predators to the spot. Of course, the minute I get close, another driver has the same idea. Even though I know in my head that I was there first, I decide to defer to this woman with a courtesy wave, and I head toward the back of the lot. Then, something strange happens on the way into the building. The driver is waiting there, holding the door for me as I enter the building. She introduces herself and thanks me for being so kind. We end up chatting for a while.

In the span of a few moments, the buckets of both women were filled. Tammy continues:

I get into the office, sit down in my less-than-spectacular cubicle, and check my electronic calendar. I see that my 10:00 appointment reads:

"Performance Review w/Bill. " My stomach just sinks; I want to run home and call in sick. I know exactly what this means. Bill, my boss, must have interviewed my peers the day before and asked them all about my "opportunities for improvement." Sure enough, the meeting confirms my suspicions. Bill has prepared a list of eight things that I need to work on fixing over the next six months. Not once does he mention any of my recent successes, even though I had worked more than 70 hours last week to complete a major proposal. After what feels like a couple days, I leave his office in a lousy mood. I think to myself. • Why do I even stay with this company?

In a short period of time, Bill all but emptied Tammy's bucket. She continues:

9 out of 10 people say they are more productive when they're around positive people

Later on, I am walking down the hall, and I run into Karen, one of the company's top executives. We had worked together briefly on last week's big proposal. As I pass Karen, she slows down and says, "Hi, Tammy. That was great work on the final section of our proposal last week. "I am just amazed that she even remembered my name. More than half of the people in my workgroup call me Tamara, which isn't even the name I prefer.

If Karen had just said "Hi, Tammy," that might have been enough. But offering Tammy meaningful and specific praise made her day. Her bucket was filled quickly. And the funny thing is, Karen might have thought she was just making a simple comment in passing; she probably couldn't imagine the positive impact.

## Our Negative Culture

Most of us want more positive emotions in our lives. We want to feel like Tammy did in her brief meeting with Karen more often - and like she did after her performance review less often. Unfortunately, wanting a more positive environment isn't enough. Most of us have grown up in a culture in which it's much easier to tell people what they did wrong instead of praising them when they succeed. Although this negativity-based approach might have evolved unintentionally, it nevertheless permeates our society at all levels.

this focus on what is wrong is particularly evident in our school



experiences. Instead of celebrating what makes each child unique, most parents push their children to "fit in" so that they don't "stick out." This unwittingly stomps out individuality and encourages conformity, despite these parents' good intentions.

And our schools, which are built around core curricula that students have to learn regardless of their interests or natural talents, reinforce this kind of thinking. When a child excels at a subject and receives an A, what happens? Rather than recognizing and developing areas of talent, teachers and parents skip past the A and focus on raising the lower grades on the report card. And very few principals or guidance counselors are known for calling students into the office to discuss outstanding grades.

One Gallup Poll measured parents' focus on their children's best grades compared to their focus on their worst grades across multiple countries and cultures. The question posed to parents was: "Your child shows you the following grades: English - A; Social Studies - A; Biology - C; Algebra - F. Which grade deserves the most attention from you?" The vast majority of parents in every country focused on the F.

[image]

Unfortunately, parents get caught up in the "How can I get my kid into college?" race instead of first considering what's best for the development of their sons and daughters. This isn't to say that parents should ignore the F in Algebra. But why not start with a positive focus on the As before working on strategies for improving the F? If parents at least began these discussions on a more positive note, it could make for a more productive conversation.

At least when students graduate and enter the working world, they have the opportunity to do what they want - right? This is their time to pursue their grand passions. Well, that may be true for a select few. Unfortunately, the majority of young people aren't selected for their first job on the basis of how well their natural talents fit their role.

Think back to your first career-oriented job, and see if this scenario sounds familiar: Essentially, you were hired for a job, then you were expected to change who you were to fit the role. If you struggled, then you may have had to endure a program designed to fix the problem. The weakness-based approach follows us throughout our lives, from school to the workplace.

They Missed It

More than 80 years ago, the fields of education and psychology overlooked an important study - one with implications that could have, and probably should have, altered the ensuing focus of human inquiry. It's possible that we've all been suffering from the oversight ever since.

The study, conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Hurlock in 1925, was designed to explore what would happen when fourth and sixth-grade students in a math class received different types of feedback on their work. Hurlock wanted to find out if it was more effective to praise, criticize, or ignore students. The outcome was to be determined by how many math problems each student had solved 2, 3, 4, and 5 days later.

Children in the first group were identified by name and praised in front of the classroom for their good work. Children in the second group were also identified by name in front of the group, but they were criticized for their poor work. Those in the third group were completely ignored, although they were present to hear the others being praised and scolded. A fourth (control) group was moved to another room after the first test. Members of this group took the same tests, but they received no comments on their performance.

Students in both the "praised" and "criticized" groups did better after the first day. Then their performance changed dramatically. The students who were criticized showed a major decline in their test scores, and by Days 3 and 4, they were performing on par with students who had been completely ignored.

[image]

In contrast, the students who were praised experienced a major improvement after Day 2 that was sustained through the end of the study. By the fifth day of this experiment, the group that received praise showed unequivocally stronger performance than the other study groups. The overall improvement by group was:

Praised - 71%

Criticized - 19%

Ignored - 5%

You would think that this study caused quite a stir among psychologists and educators. But it didn't. Until recently, the scientific community has focused almost exclusively on studying the effects of negative or traumatic moments. That focus is finally starting to change.

Some of the world's leading academic minds are now devoting their careers to analyzing the effects of positive emotions.

We experience approximately 20,000 individual moments every day

These recent studies show that negative emotions can be harmful to your health and might even shorten your life span. We already know that one negative person can ruin an entire workplace, but negative emotions can also destroy relationships, families, and entire careers.

In contrast, other discoveries suggest that positive emotions are an essential daily requirement for survival. Not only do they improve your physical and mental health, but they can also provide a buffer against depression and illness.

### Thousands of Moments Every Day

According to Nobel Prize-winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman, we experience approximately 20,000 individual moments in a waking day. Each moment lasts a few seconds. If you consider any strong memory - positive or negative - you'll notice that the imagery in your mind is actually defined by your recollection of a precise point in time. And rarely does a neutral encounter stay in your mind - the memorable moments are almost always positive or negative. In some cases, a single encounter can change your life forever.

Katie Couric once interviewed a young man named Brian Bennett who had grown up in a troubled and abusive environment. He had struggled in school and had been picked on regularly at a young age. Now, Brian is a successful and well-adjusted adult. When Couric asked him, "What made the difference?" the young man responded without thinking twice: the defining moment in his life occurred when a grade school teacher simply told him that she cared about him and believed in him. This one small interaction turned Brian Bennett's life around.

The magic ratio:

5 positive interactions

for every

1 negative interaction

In another case, we asked Kristin, a management consultant, "What is the greatest recognition you have ever received?" Her answer: "Three words in an e-mail." We then found out that when Kristin's mother passed away, a mentor at work whom Kristin had admired throughout her career wrote her a special note. Her mentor's e-mail concluded by saying: "Your mother was very proud of you, and so am I." After 25 years with her company, three simple words carried more meaning than any other recognition Kristin had received in her entire life.

## The Magic Ratio

Of course, few moments are this profound, but even less memorable interactions are important. Experts are finding that the frequency of small, positive acts is critical. John Gottman's pioneering research on marriages suggests there is a "magic ratio" of 5 to 1 - in terms of our balance of positive to negative interactions. Gottman found that marriages are significantly more likely to succeed when the couple's interactions are near that 5 to 1 ratio of positive to negative. When the ratio approaches 1 to 1, marriages "cascade to divorce."

## Too much positive emotion?

More than 13 positive interactions for every 1 negative interaction could decrease productivity

In a fascinating study, Gottman teamed up with two mathematicians to test this model. Starting in 1992, they recruited 700 couples who had just received their marriage licenses. For each couple, the researchers videotaped a 15-minute conversation between husband and wife and counted the number of positive and negative interactions. then, based on the 5 to 1 ratio, they predicted whether each couple would stay together or divorce.

Ten years later, Gottman and his colleagues followed up with each couple to determine the accuracy of their original predictions. The results were stunning. They had predicted divorce with 94% accuracy - based on scoring the couples' interactions for 15 minutes.

This ratio is critical in the workplace as well. One study found that workgroups with positive-to-negative interaction ratios greater than 3 to 1 are significantly more productive than teams that do not reach this ratio. Fredrickson and Losada's mathematical modeling of positive-to-negative ratios, however, also suggests the existence of an upper limit. Things can worsen if the ratio goes higher than 13 to 1.

So while this book focuses primarily on ways to increase positive emotions, it's important to note that we don't recommend ignoring negativity and weakness; positivity must be grounded in reality. A "Pollyanna" approach, in which the negative is completely ignored, can result in a false optimism that is counterproductive - and sometimes downright annoying. There are times when it's absolutely necessary to correct our mistakes and figure out how to manage our weaknesses.

## Extending longevity:

Increasing positive emotions could lengthen life span by 10 years

But most of us don't have to worry about breaking the upper limit. The positive-to-negative ratios in most organizations are woefully inadequate and leave substantial room for improvement.

## Increasing Longevity

Negative emotions can lead to serious problems. Thousands of studies have revealed the damaging results of stress, anger, and hostility on the mind and body. In contrast, positive emotions can buffer us against adverse health effects and depression. They enable faster recovery from pain, trauma, and illness. And positive emotions might lead to an increase in life span.

Researchers who studied 839 Mayo Clinic patients over a 30-year period found a link between optimism in how people explained life events and a lower risk of early death. And a landmark study of 180 elderly Catholic nuns revealed that nuns with more positive emotions lived significantly longer than nuns with fewer positive emotions. The researchers studied handwritten autobiographies each woman had written in her early twenties. The frequency of positive emotions in these early writings was scored and compared to mortality rates for these women when they were 75 to 95 years old.

The results were staggering. The nuns who reported experiencing more positive emotions lived, on average, about 10 years longer. Even more startling was the fact that 25 nuns in the group with fewer positive emotions had passed away at the time of the study, compared with only 10 deaths in the group with more positive emotions.

To put this in perspective, consider that cigarette smoking has been

shown to reduce life expectancy by 5.5 years for males and 7 years for females. So, negative emotions might cut more years off of life expectancy than smoking. There's no surgeon general's warning about toxic emotions, but perhaps there should be.

## Physical and Mental Health Effects

In addition to extending our life span, positive emotions can improve our daily physical and mental well-being. A study of Harvard graduates revealed that the way in which young men explained negative events - pessimistically or optimistically - predicted several physical health outcomes decades later. Specifically, optimism early in life predicted good health later in life.

Other studies suggest that optimism can ward off and shorten the duration of the common cold. Based on studies that analyzed blood counts, optimists were found to have more T4 or "helper" cells that fight against infection. Optimists have also been found to average less than one doctor visit per year, while pessimists average more than 3.5 visits per year. Increasing the positive emotions in your life might even help to minimize your healthcare costs.

It's clear that positive emotions directly affect our physical health, but what about our mental health and interactions with others?

Barbara Fredrickson, a leading researcher on the impact of positive emotions, has done a great deal of research on this subject. She reports: "Positive emotions do much more than merely signal well-being. Positive emotions also improve coping and produce well-being. They do so not just in the present, pleasant moment, but over the long term as well.... Positive emotions are not trivial luxuries, but instead may be critical necessities for optimal functioning."

Indeed, Fredrickson concludes that positive emotions:

- ❖ protect us from, and can undo the effects of, negative emotions
- ❖ fuel resilience and can transform people

broaden our thinking, encouraging us to discover • new lines of thought or action

break down racial barriers

- ❖ produce optimal functioning in organizations and individuals

❖ build durable physical, intellectual, social, and psychological resources that can function as "reserves" during trying times

❖ improve the overall performance of a group (when leaders express more positive emotions)

It appears that science is just beginning to scratch the surface on this topic. After centuries of studying mental illness, experts are finally investigating and attempting to measure mental wellness.

# CHAPTER FOUR



# Tom's Story: An Overflowing Bucket

As you read this book, you may be wondering: "Isn't being positive or negative genetic and somewhat hard to change?" It's an understandable question; we all know people who seem to be (and probably are) born with a negative predisposition. And you undoubtedly have met people who seem innately, irrepressibly positive.

The scientific community has varying views on this matter. Some studies suggest that positivity and negativity are primarily rooted in nature; others argue for nurture. "The most common theory right now is that both nature and nurture make a significant, and possibly equal, contribution.

Noted psychologist Ed Diener describes how our capacity for happiness has a "baseline" measure, much like our physical weight. Just as some people are predisposed to be thin no matter what they eat, some people have a natural tendency to be happier than others. But our level of positive emotions can certainly rise or fall a great deal based on what happens to us over time.

Regardless of an individual's innate starting point, regular bucket filling can increase his or her positive emotions. To illustrate the long-term impact, we decided to share a personal story.

## A Birthday Present

Shortly after we started working on this book, I realized that Don's birthday was right around the corner, so I decided to write him a letter detailing the importance of bucket filling in my own life. I figured this birthday present would have more meaning than a standard gift. And knowing that Don was facing an uphill battle with cancer, I thought this was the right time to express my appreciation and gratitude.

When I was very young, I remember Don saying that we should gather to celebrate all the great things that a person has done while he or she is still around to be part of the celebration. When he went to funerals, it bothered him that so many people waited until they were eulogizing

a loved one to liberally fill his or her bucket. "Why not do this while they are alive?" he would ask.

So on Don's 79th birthday, I shared this very personal story with him. When he read it, he was moved to tears. A few days later, Don asked if I would consider sharing my story in this book. He thought it would be a good illustration of continuous bucket filling, so I agreed.

What follows is the story I gave to Don on his birthday. It is an account of how regular bucket filling shaped my own life while I was growing up.

### Searching for Early Traces of Talent

As the first child of my generation in a large, extended family, I benefited from a unique method of child rearing. It certainly defied the conventional wisdom at that time. From the day I was born, each member of my family was determined to help me focus on what I did best. They provided constant support and encouragement.

By the time I turned four, my mother and grandmother had spotted my keen interest in reading. So they would sit with me for hours on end, helping me learn to read. This teaching, nurturing, and attention made a real difference.

Whenever relatives dropped by, they would ask what I was reading or pose specific questions about activities I enjoyed. In hindsight, it is easy to see that they were looking for early cues to my natural yearnings and talents. The minute my family noticed my passion in a certain area, they encouraged me to learn as much as possible on that topic. When I was about eight or nine, they noticed my budding entrepreneurial spirit. Not long thereafter, my grandfather (Don) suggested starting my own business. I loved the idea and decided to open a snack stand.

After a few months, this little enterprise was doing well. "Biz Kids" had enough business to move beyond buying from the local wholesale club, and a major candy distributor agreed to give our company a bulk rate and deliver to our location. We eventually moved beyond snacks, expanding into selling apparel and small merchandise. By the time I was 12, the operation employed more than 20 of my classmates, and we had made a couple thousand dollars in real profit to share among ourselves. After a few years in business, this story landed on the cover of the local newspaper and was picked up by national news wires.

All of the caring, attention, and genuine bucket filling were making a major difference in my life. My bucket was overflowing, and this allowed me to concentrate on filling the buckets of everyone around me. At the end of each month, I would give out awards and commission checks based on how much each person had sold. It was fun to watch as my own bucket filling lifted the spirits of my friends, family members, and very young coworkers.

This focus on positive encouragement continued throughout my education. My parents asked about my favorite classes and extracurricular activities on a regular basis. And instead of criticizing me when I wasn't doing well in music or art courses, they encouraged me to focus more time on the areas that gave me personal satisfaction. They noticed that I was quite analytical and enjoyed numbers and current events, so they recommended that I spend more time studying mathematics and the social sciences. Even though I was already an A student in those areas, my family realized there would be a greater return on my education if I devoted more time to subjects for which I had a natural passion.

Unlike most of my teachers and my friends' parents, my parents were not determined to make me well-rounded. Given that my rhythm seems to have been surgically removed at birth, they understood that pushing me to be a better musician was fruitless; I might get to average at best. A popular saying in my home was this age-old maxim: "Never try to teach a pig to sing. It wastes your time, and it annoys the pig." As a young student, I found this quite liberating. I didn't have to try to be good at everything. Instead, I was able to strive for greatness in my areas of natural talent.

### A Safe and Welcoming Home

In contrast to my own home, I recall how strange it felt when I visited a friend's house in grade school. We would walk in the door, filled with after-school energy. And the first thing his mother would say was always something like:

"Did I say you could have a friend over?"

"Did you get in trouble at school again?"

"You better not have flunked that test!"

Maybe what she said was warranted sometimes. But I was amazed that the first thing out of his mom's mouth was always so negative.

Another one of my classmates would arrive home each day to find a handwritten list of negative notes on her bed with phrases like "You need to improve your attitude." At first, I thought these friends must have had troubled families. But over time, I found out this was common. In hindsight, this explains why my friends and I spent so much time at my house while growing up.

## Confronting a Major Challenge

My life continued to unfold in this positive way - until I was 16. At that point, I started experiencing poor vision in my left eye and confronted my first big life obstacle.

Doctors discovered multiple tumors in my eye and performed several major surgeries. A year later, all sight in my left eye had been lost - permanently. On top of that, the condition indicated a possible "genetic abnormality" that causes sporadic tumors to grow throughout the body. The results of a DNA test confirmed that I had this extremely rare disorder: von Hippel-Lindau disease. As a result, tumors were likely to show up in my pancreas, kidneys, eardrums, adrenal glands, brain, and spine with no advance warning.

Upon hearing this news for the first time, I was shocked and nervous. But, on some level, I was surprised by how little the news dampened my spirits. From that day forward, instead of dwelling on the negative or uncontrollable aspects of this disease, my family helped me focus on what could be done. Although I felt fearful at times, I never got depressed. At a crucial moment, that kind of genuine caring had a remarkable influence.

Within the first week of finding out about my condition, I immersed myself in learning how to manage and live with this disorder. Looking back, the key was not viewing my prognosis as any type of curse or death sentence. Instead, I saw it as an opportunity to be proactive and stay on top of my physical health. After continuing to learn more about this rare disease, I discovered that most of the tumors associated with my condition were manageable with early detection and treatment. I resolved to measure my progress with regular scans and checkups.

In the meantime, things continued almost exactly as they had before. My everyday life did not change. Over the next several years, the only time I thought about my condition was every 6 to 12 months when it was time for medical checkups. Sure, waiting for the results of my

MRI and CT scans made me anxious. But I managed to keep those feelings in perspective. In many ways, my confidence and spirit were stronger than ever.

My approach was to confront these challenges headon. I'm not sure I was totally conscious of my attitude at the time, but I didn't let these problems overwhelm me. A decade later, my close friends would admit how frightened and concerned they were for me during that time. They also recall being mystified by my lack of day-to-day worries about this condition. But there was nothing strange or incomprehensible about it: The daily drops in my bucket from friends and family had built a reserve in my bucket that was sustainable during tough times.

## A Surplus of Positive Emotions

Unfortunately, there were more challenges ahead.

During my senior year of college, an exam revealed a tumor in one of my adrenal glands. Five years later, doctors found cancerous tumors in my kidney. While working on this book, scans revealed several new tumors on my pancreas, adrenal glands, and spinal cord.

In each case, I felt fear and initial frustration. But my most memorable reaction was a sense of relief in knowing that these tumors were caught before they could metastasize and spread to other organs. My vigilance and awareness of the disease had paid off. Each condition could be managed with surgery. So I reviewed as many articles as I could find on each condition, wanting to fully understand my surgical options and the associated risks. All of my energy was focused on what could be done. My energy was not focused on what had already occurred or aspects beyond my control.

To this day, I have never asked, "Why did all of this happen to me?"

I mean it. I may have been frustrated, but I've never railed against fate - and there's a big difference between the two. I saw no good reason to sit around and dwell on the negative or feel sorry for myself. It would get me nowhere. Besides, such wallowing could have worsened my emotional and physical health. Although the threat of facing various forms of cancer is with me every day, I see no alternative other than to focus on what can be done next to stay ahead of this disease. And I can honestly say that it's easy to maintain this attitude on a daily basis as a result of all of the positive support from my family members and friends.

My case is obviously an extreme example of the impact of bucket filling. It might even sound contrived to me if I were reading this story for the first time. But let me reassure you that every word is true. Given my ongoing physical challenges, this high-dose bucket filling has literally saved my life.

We are all certain to face major challenges as we progress through our lives. Often, we feel as if we were "dealt a bad hand" and that life is unfair. But we don't have to allow ourselves to be defined by our hardships. Our responses to difficult events and our emotional state are much more important. Continual reinforcement about our strengths can buffer us against getting overwhelmed with the negative. And understanding what we do best allows us not only to survive, but grow and thrive, in the face of adversity.

# CHAPTER FIVE

# Making it Personal

the personal story you just read is admittedly unusual, but there are countless examples of people whose lives were made better and more productive by frequent bucket filling. In fact, you can see this happening in great workplaces all the time.

Remember that customer service representative in Chapter Two who treated you so well when you called in with a problem? Let's say you were so impressed that you asked for his name, which you found out was Ted. And let's also say that you called back later to tell Ted's supervisor what he had done to win you over. As you were giving details about Ted's friendly voice or his ability to relate to your problem, his supervisor was scribbling notes as fast as he possibly could.

thirty minutes later, as Ted completed a call in which he won over yet another irate customer (yes, he does this all day), he got an e-mail message from his boss.

the first thing Ted noticed when he opened the message was that his boss had copied a group of Ted's closest friends from work on the e-mail. The subject line read: "You Made a Difference Today." Ted's eyes immediately moved to the text of the message, where his supervisor described exactly what Ted had done to win you over. As he detailed the scenario for Ted and his peers, he dropped in several direct quotes from your conversation. Ted's supervisor ended the note by explaining how Ted's actions not only satisfied a customer but also "made that person's day a lot easier."

As Ted was reading the note, he could barely contain the giant grin on his face. Though fatigued from a long workday in which multiple customers berated him, he was suddenly rejuvenated by the message.

Ted's boss knew the key to great bucket filling: Recognition is most appreciated and effective when it is individualized, specific, and deserved. Clearly, he understood that writing an e-mail and copying Ted's peers would give Ted a real boost. And perhaps Ted's boss also knows that the same approach won't work for Ted's colleagues, some of whom may prefer a quiet pat on the back or perhaps more boisterous praise in a meeting.



The point is, there are unique and specific ways to fill each person's bucket - and most certainly inappropriate ways as well. Generic, one-size-fits-all awards don't work. Neither does recognition that seems forced or false.

And sometimes the recognition you think will inspire an employee backfires in the worst - and most public - way.

### The Nightmare Scenario

Consider the true story of Susan, a manager, and her stellar customer service representative, Matt. The following events transpired at a large insurance company that Gallup consulted with several years ago. When Susan became a division manager in this organization, she quickly learned that her success would hinge on her ability to inspire her customer service group toward better performance.

At one point in her career, Susan was a customer service rep herself, and she just loved to win big awards and hear the ovations when she stood up in front of a crowd of her colleagues. During the workday, she would look up at some of her favorite certificates on the wall and remember the rush she felt from winning an award. That really got her going.

So, Susan decided to set up a major awards ceremony to recognize her customer service reps. She held the event at the finest hotel in the city. She invited all of the reps and their families to the celebration, and she hired a well-known speaker and entertainer.

The last portion of the program was the major yearend recognition for the individual reps with the best annual performances. To further highlight Matt, the top producer, Susan would save his award for last. She wanted that presentation to be the night's main event. The drape-covered easel on the stage inspired a lot of chatter and anticipation.

Susan hoped this award would motivate Matt for years to come, so before announcing that Matt was the top producer, Susan detailed a long list of all the star employee's accomplishments and showered him with praise. Then, she pulled the drape off the award and held the prize over her head as she read Matt's name. This was the moment Susan had been scripting in her head for the past few weeks. She had even imagined the delighted look on Matt's face.

To Susan's amazement, just the opposite happened: Matt was furious!

The painful expression on his face and his hostile body language spoke volumes.

The angry rep walked to the microphone and proceeded to tell the group that he didn't even want the award - it was just another award to hang on the wall and had no meaning for him. Plus, he had a bunch already; he didn't need one more.

It was one of the worst nights of Susan's life. Not only had this debacle hurt the morale of the group, Susan now needed to figure out a way to win back her best customer service representative. So, after Susan got over the shock of the ordeal, she started to think about how she could acknowledge Matt in the future.

### A One-Size-Does-Not-Fit-All Approach

Susan started by learning more about Matt. She discovered that this star employee loved nothing more than his two young daughters. Whenever Matt talked about them, his face lit up. At the office, he was always showing off the newest pictures of his daughters.

The next year, Matt was again one of the top customer service reps. And this time, Susan was determined to get the awards ceremony right. She had called Matt's wife and asked her to take the two girls to a professional photographer in the area for a formal portrait and to keep it a secret.

When the big night rolled around, everything was in place. Susan began the ceremony by talking about a very special man. She described not only the top customer service rep, but the passionate family man as well. Then, Susan unveiled the beautiful portrait of Matt's two lovely daughters.

Matt walked up on stage and gave Susan a big hug; his eyes were filled with tears. Everyone in the room was moved. Matt couldn't have imagined a more meaningful and personal kind of recognition. It changed the way he looked at his boss and job forever.

### Individualize, Individualize, Individualize

The lesson here is clear: If you want people to understand that you value their contributions and that they are important, the recognition and praise you provide must have meaning that is specific to each individual.

Not only is individualized bucket filling more effective in boosting productivity in the workplace, it builds sustainable relationships and changes people's lives forever.

# CHAPTER SIX

# Five Strategies for Increasing

# Positive Emotions

To increase positive emotions in your life and others' lives, you must make a habit of filling buckets. This isn't news to you; by now, we know that our relationships, careers, and lives will be much more fulfilling if we increase the flow of positive emotions around us.

But just knowing this isn't enough. Like any goal in life, you must have specific, actionable plans to transform good intentions into reality. So we examined our database of more than 4,000 open-ended interview responses on this topic and narrowed the list down to the five strategies that are most likely to produce results.

In this chapter, we will review each of the five strategies for increasing positive emotions. And in the back of this 5th Anniversary Edition, you will find a guide for applying these strategies in your teams and organizations. This guide is a removable section that can be used for sessions with groups and teams in your organization.

## The Five Strategies

### STRATEGY ONE

Prevent Bucket Dipping

### STRATEGY TWO

Shine a Light on What Is Right

### STRATEGY THREE

Make Best Friends

### STRATEGY FOUR

Give Unexpectedly

### STRATEGY FIVE

Reverse the Golden Rule

# STRATEGY ONE

# Prevent Bucket Dipping

Just as we have to start eliminating debt before we can truly save, we must start to eliminate bucket dipping before we can truly begin to fill buckets.

After hearing the Theory of the Dipper and the Bucket, one man we know decided to put it to the test. He was looking for a way to eliminate his own dipping from others' buckets. So he developed a simple habit of asking himself if he was adding to or taking from the other person's bucket in each interaction. He told us it was a difficult habit to get into at first, but after some time, he realized it was working. By catching himself before he uttered a negative comment - and in some cases, making a positive one instead - he started making himself and the people around him feel better.

For the next few days, try to catch yourself in the act of bucket dipping - then stop it. Consider your most recent interactions. Have you poked fun at someone? Touched on an insecurity? Blatantly pointed out something that person does wrong? If so, try and push the "pause" button in your head next time.

Once you've successfully curtailed your own bucket dipping, encourage similar changes among those around you. Are people in your workgroup or school chronically criticizing or mocking others? Do you ever notice them teaming up and "group dipping" from someone's bucket? The next time you see bucket dipping in progress, do something about it. Convince others that unwarranted negativity only makes matters worse.

Once you've consciously started to eliminate bucket dipping, keep track of your progress by scoring your interactions. That's right: Reflect on your last few exchanges with another person. Decide if, overall, each interaction was more positive or negative. Score each one as either a "+" or "-" in your head. Write them down if you need to. Were the majority of those interactions positive or negative?

Now, as you consider what it would take to fill the buckets of your friends, family, coworkers, and others, ask yourself: "What would it take for me to reach that 'magic ratio' of five positive interactions for every one negative interaction that I read about in Chapter Three?"





# STRATEGY TWO

# Shine a Light on What Is Right

Each interaction gives us the chance to shine a light on what's right - and fill a bucket.

A friend of ours recently discovered the power of focusing on what is right. Unhappy in her marriage, she had been after her husband for weeks to make changes. He didn't seem interested in spending much time with her, and when she complained, he got defensive. So she drew even more attention to the things that upset her, hoping he would notice. Instead, she found that things seemed to get worse.

Realizing that telling her husband how much he disappointed her wasn't working, she tried an experiment: She began to draw attention to the things he did well and what she liked about him. She was skeptical, but she had nothing to lose. What do you think happened? After several days, her husband was happier when he came home and more engaged in the relationship. Eventually, his attentiveness and warmth began to fill her bucket - just as her positive outlook toward him had filled his.

But the most unexpected thing was that she felt happier, on her own, by focusing on the positive rather than dwelling on the negative. And this, in turn, caused her to be much more positive in her interactions with other people. After a few weeks, both she and her husband were passing this newfound energy along to friends and coworkers.

Never underestimate the long-term influence of filling others' buckets. According to one expert, these positive emotions create "chains of interpersonal events," the farreaching results of which you may or may not get to see in person. But they are there and happening.

Every time you fill a bucket, you're setting something in motion.

Consider this: If you fill two buckets a day, and the owners of those two buckets go on to fill two new buckets, more than a thousand buckets will have been filled at the end of 10 days. So continue the chain: When someone fills your bucket, accept it - never just brush it off and diminish what that person is doing. Fill their bucket in return by saying thank you and letting them know that you appreciate the compliment or recognition. In turn, you are more likely to share your renewed positive energy with others.

Do you want to see how much bucket filling you do compared to others? On our website, you'll find a Positive Impact Test designed with just that purpose in mind. (the 15 statements that make up the Positive Impact Test are listed on the next page.) This test was created to help you determine if you are filling buckets on a regular basis; the statements evaluate key areas of your progress. We encourage you to complete this assessment right away so you have an initial score that indicates whether you have low impact, some impact, or high impact on your environment. The Positive Impact Report you receive after you take the test will give you that score and show you how your score compares to others, based on results from a Gallup Poll.

Don't be concerned if your score is low at first. This assessment was designed to provide you with a measure for continuous improvement. To be even more intentional about your progress in bucket filling, consider printing the list of statements from the website, and use them as a guide for increasing your positive impact.

Encourage your friends to take the Positive Impact Test if you want to see how your score compares to theirs. It might be interesting to identify the best bucket fillers in your workgroup, circle of friends, or family. Try it out now, and again in a few months. See if your score has improved.

### Positive Impact Test

1. I have helped someone in the last 24 hours.
2. I am an exceptionally courteous person.
3. I like being around positive people.
4. I have praised someone in the last 24 hours.
5. I have developed a knack for making other people feel good.
6. I am more productive when I am around positive people.
7. In the last 24 hours, I have told someone that I cared about her or him.
8. I make it a point to become acquainted with people wherever I go.
9. When I receive recognition, it makes me want to give recognition to someone else.

10. In the last week, I have listened to someone talk through his or her goals and ambitions.
11. I make unhappy people laugh.
12. I make it a point to call each of my associates by the name she or he likes to be called.
13. I notice what my colleagues do at a level of excellence.
14. I always smile at the people I meet.
15. I feel good about giving praise whenever I see good behavior.

# STRATEGY THREE

# Make Best Friends

In grade school, kids often stick with sports teams, cheerleading, music, or other extracurricular groups, even when the activity isn't a clear fit for their interests. If they're experiencing no push from parents and having little success, why do they stay involved? Maybe it's the same reason why employees stay with organizations that are less than ideal, or even unhealthy - they probably have a best friend there.

If you think about it, most of us join and stay with groups, teams, and organizations because of our best friends. We say "best friend" because our study of great workplaces found that having "friends," "good friends," or "close friends" on the job was not as important as having "a best friend at work." People with best friends at work have better safety records, receive higher customer satisfaction scores, and increase workplace productivity.

Even though the term "best friend" does imply exclusivity, it doesn't necessarily mean that you should limit yourself to one very close friend. We would even go as far as to recommend that you have several relationships of the best-friend caliber among your workplace, home, and social circles.

Great relationships lead to a significant increase in life satisfaction. Noted psychologist Ed Diener found that "the happiest people have high-quality social relationships." On the other hand, Diener and other researchers have found that lonely people suffer psychologically.

Consider some of your best relationships. They were probably formed through an early series of positive interactions. You're not likely to become good friends with someone if the majority of your initial interactions are negative. Remember this during your first interactions with a new acquaintance.

Start by learning the names of people you see regularly - and for each one, make sure you learn the name he or she prefers to be called. Sure, this may seem like a small thing, but it can make a major impression. It's tough to build relationships until you know someone by name. Your acquaintances may soon become friends.

Whether you want to build many relationships or just a few deep

ones, your best approach is to fill a person's bucket in your very first interaction. This is a powerful way to initiate new relationships - and to strengthen your existing relationships. In fact, your friendships are unlikely to survive, let alone thrive, without regular bucket filling.

Put this concept to work today. Begin with the most important people in your life. Tell them how important they are to you and why. Don't assume they already know - even if they do, they'd probably love to hear it anyway. Continue to learn more about what builds them up; be a catalyst for an even more trusting, lasting, and positive relationship.

Listen to your friends with unconditional, positive regard. Support them in their endeavors. Encourage them. Be a mentor, or at least be the person they know they can always go to for a kind word.

But don't stop the process with family and friends. At work, become the person known for noticing when others do a great job. Learn something new about each person you work or interact with. Create positive interactions with acquaintances - even strangers.

You might start to notice that more and more people want to be around you.



# STRATEGY FOUR

# Give Unexpectedly

In Chapter three, we mentioned a television interview in which a troubled student described to Katie Couric how the encouraging words of one grade school teacher turned around his entire life. There were a few twists to the segment that morning. As soon as the young man, Brian Bennett, finished telling his story, Couric surprised him by bringing his teacher onto the set. Brian's face lit up as she walked out with her husband, who had been one of his favorite high school teachers.

As it turns out, these two mentors just happened to be Barbara and Mac Bledsoe, the parents of former NFL Pro Bowl quarterback Drew Bledsoe. After they visited with one another, Couric announced that she had another surprise for Brian: Drew Bledsoe walked out and gave Brian his jersey and football. Brian was overwhelmed with positive emotions as a result of this unexpected gift.

According to a Gallup Poll, the vast majority of people prefer gifts that are unexpected. Expected gifts do fill our buckets, but for some reason, receiving things unexpectedly fills our buckets just a little more. It's about the element of surprise. And the gift doesn't have to be anything big to be successful.

Luxury retailer Saks Fifth Avenue conducted an experiment in which sales associates surprised customers who were known to shop infrequently with a small gift. Although it was a mere token of Saks' appreciation, the customers loved it, and the sales associates did too. This program helped grow the stores' business by transforming casual shoppers into regular customers.

An unexpected gift doesn't have to be tangible either. It can be a gift of trust or responsibility. Sharing something personal or entrusting a friend with a secret can fill his or her bucket.

In your own interactions, look for opportunities to give small gifts to others out of the blue - maybe a funny little trinket, a hug, or an offer to grab a cup of coffee. Even a smile can be an unexpected and cherished gift. Consider unexpected sharing as well. What books, articles, or stories could you send someone that would positively influence his or her day?

In the spirit of giving unexpectedly, here is a gift from us to you. We want to share with you something that has already helped more than a million people discover their strengths. It's the product of decades of Gallup's study, it has been used in 48 countries, and it is the cornerstone of several books, including the national bestsellers *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, and *Strengths Based Leadership*.

It's called the Clifton StrengthsFinder. Don created this web-based assessment to help people uncover their talents. Research shows that people who complete this assessment and learn about their strengths are more confident, more positive, more productive, and have more direction in their lives. And they are also more likely to focus on the strengths of other people - and thus fill their buckets. We hope that taking the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment and learning about your natural talents will fill your bucket and, at the same time, make you a more effective bucket filler.

Inside the packet at the back of this book, you will find a unique access code and instructions that will allow you to take the Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment. Upon completion, you will receive a customized guide that will get you started on building your Top 5 themes of talent. We hope you take advantage of this opportunity to see inside yourself and share what you discover with others.

# STRATEGY FIVE

# Reverse the Golden Rule

In the case of bucket filling, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" doesn't apply. Instead, we suggest a slight variation: "Do unto others as they would have you do unto them." We devoted Chapter Five to illustrating this point, but we want to reiterate: When it comes to robust and meaningful bucket filling, individualization is key. So when you're bucket filling, go ahead and reverse - or at least redefine - the Golden Rule.

As you learned from Matt, the customer service representative who received the portrait of his daughters, the things that make you unique also determine what really fills your bucket - and vice versa. It's unlikely that the exact same things will mean quite as much to anyone else; some of us prefer tangible rewards or gifts, while others are driven by words and acknowledgement. And while certain people want to receive kind words in front of a crowd, others prefer a quieter, one-to-one commendation or compliment from someone they love, admire, or respect.

Another important aspect of individualization is this: What we recognize in others helps them shape their identity and their future accomplishments. This is why bucket filling must be specific to the individual.

Not sure how to start? Just ask some questions. We've included a few for you to consider. Try them out on your friends. If you're a manager, discover the power of asking your people these questions - and then acting on them.

## The Gallup Recognition Interview

1. By what name do you like to be called?
2. What are your hobbies or interests that you like to talk about a lot?
3. What increases your positive emotions or "fills your bucket" the most?
4. From whom do you most like to receive recognition or praise?
5. What type of recognition or praise do you like best? Do you like

public, private, written, verbal, or other kinds of recognition?

6. What form of recognition motivates you the most? Do you like gift certificates, a title for winning a competition, a meaningful note or e-mail, or something else?

7. What is the greatest recognition you have ever received?

In addition to being individualized, it will mean more to the recipient if your praise is specific. Putting praise into writing or e-mail is a great way to do this. Written recognition is also especially rewarding because it serves as a lasting acknowledgement - something the recipient can reflect on over and over again.

On the book's website, you'll find a tool for printing and e-mailing "drops for your bucket." Drops are just one way to provide brief, personalized, written recognition. They have been used in businesses, schools, and places of worship for more than three decades, and millions of people have sent and received them. Some people have kept the drops they received for many years as a reminder of their accomplishments. Feel free to use this system, or make up your own - whatever works best for you and each recipient.

Now here's our challenge: Set a goal to write at least five drops, or give five specific forms of recognition every month. Once you're done writing a drop, you can quietly slip the note to the recipient in person, send it, e-mail it, or read it out loud. Do whatever fills his or her bucket most. This is the essence of great bucket filling.

## EPILOGUE

Imagine what your world will be like one year after you have engaged in daily bucket filling. We suspect the following changes will have occurred:

- ❖ Your workplace will be a lot more productive and fun.
- ❖ You'll have more friends.
- ❖ Your colleagues and customers will be more satisfied and engaged.
- ❖ Your marriage will be stronger.
- ❖ You'll enjoy closer relationships with your family and friends.

❖ You'll be healthier, happier, and well on your way to a longer life.

There is plenty of scientific evidence, as well as personal stories, that demonstrate the importance of bucket filling in our lives. Take every opportunity to increase the positive emotions of those around you. It will make a big difference. It may even change the world.

Don't waste another opportunity. Every moment matters.

[image]

Now Available:

How Full Is Your Bucket? For Kids

Written by Tom Rath and Mary Reckmeyer Illustrated by MaurieJ. Manning

Every moment matters.

Each of us has an invisible bucket. When our bucket is full, we feel great. When it's empty, we feel awful. Yet most children (and many adults) don't realize the importance of having a full bucket throughout the day.

In *How Full Is Your Bucket? For Kids*, Felix begins to see how every interaction in a day either fills or empties his bucket. Felix then realizes that everything he says or does to other people fills or empties their buckets as well.

Follow along with Felix as he learns how easy it can be to fill the buckets of his classmates, teachers, and family members. Before the day is over, you'll see how Felix learns to be a great bucket filler, and in the process, discovers that filling someone else's bucket also fills his own.

How many buckets will you fill today?

Tom Rath is the author of the #1 New York Times bestseller *How Full Is Your Bucket?* He co-wrote that book with the late Dr. Donald O. Clifton (1924-2003), who had been sharing his "bucket" story since the 1960s. The adult edition of this non-fiction classic has since been adopted in homes and classrooms around the world, and it led to the creation of this special illustrated edition for kids. Tom also authored the long-running #1 Wall Street Journal bestseller *StrengthsFinder 2.0* and most recently, *Strengths Based Leadership*. His books have sold

more than a million copies and have made more than 100 appearances on the Wall Street Journal bestseller list. Tom currently leads Gallup's workplace research and leadership consulting worldwide. He and his wife, Ashley, live in Washington, D.C.

Mary Reckmeyer, Ph.D. is Executive Director of the Donald O. Clifton Child Development Center, which has received national attention for excellence in early childhood education. She developed this center more than 25 years ago, and it has now helped thousands of kids build their lives around their strengths, while also serving as a model for schools nationwide. Mary is a former preschool and elementary teacher who holds degrees in educational psychology and education. Her research focus is on youth strengths development, educational programming, and lifespan development. Mary and her husband, Matt, have four children and live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Maurie J. Manning is an author/illustrator, most recently of Kitchen Dance. She has also had the great pleasure of illustrating many other authors' books. Maurie lives in Northern California with her teen daughter, two dogs (Kip, the naughty one, looks like Felix's dog Buster), and two very talkative African Grey parrots.

Explore the How Full Is Your Bucket? website

[image]

WE WANT TO HEAR YOUR BEST

BUCKET-FILLING STORIES!

What were some of your finest moments at work or in your personal life - when your bucket was truly overflowing?

In your interactions with others, what were your most successful bucket-filling strategies?

If you enjoyed this book, we would love to hear your thoughts, comments, ideas, and answers to these questions.

[image]

Share How Full Is Your Bucket? With Friends,  
Family, and Colleagues



[image]

How Full Is Your Bucket? and How Full Is Your Bucket? Educator's Edition are available at your local bookstore or online retailer.

If you are interested in purchasing How Full Is Your Bucket? for large groups or for your organization, please contact Gallup Press about bulk quantity discounts.

Gallup Press also offers development programs, videos, employee giveaways, reselling opportunities, and other promotions based on the concepts in How Full Is Your Bucket?

To learn more, please contact us:

[image]

## NOTES

In writing How Full Is Your Bucket?, we reviewed decades of comprehensive psychological and workplace research. Many studies referenced in this book have appeared in scholarly works, but rarely have they been compiled in an easy-to-read format. For this book, we wanted to distill the most pertinent findings and make them accessible to the widest possible audience. We hoped that doing so would allow thousands more to benefit from the brilliant work of the scientists mentioned in these notes. The page number and a short phrase corresponding to each reference in the text are listed below.

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On behalf of Don and myself, I would like to thank the following people for contributing to *How Full Is Your Bucket?* Don passed away before we could work on this part of the book, but I know he would have relished the opportunity to thank everyone involved. *How Full Is Your Bucket?* represents the cumulative knowledge of hundreds, if not thousands, of great minds.

On a very personal note, I would like to start by recognizing a truly amazing developer of people, Shirley Clifton. She is the grandmother I refer to in Chapter Four who read to and cared for me every day as a child. Shirley has always been my favorite teacher and someone I take pride in calling my best friend. To our family, Shirley is the one who has always helped us to learn, grow, and thrive.

Shirley is the rock at the center of an amazing family, and she continues to inspire us today. Don's wife of 58 years, Shirley was his greatest supporter, his best friend, and an amazing lifetime partner. I admire their relationship more than any other I have witnessed. Don spent his life studying what was right, and having a marriage that defined right made this possible.

Along those lines, I would like to thank my family for their support in writing this book, and more importantly, for the impact they have had on our lives. Each one of them has spent his or her life ensuring that more and more people will be able to focus on what is right when they wake up each day. This book would not have been possible without the direction and encouragement of Connie Rath, Jim Clifton, Mary Reckmeyer, and Jane Miller.

On the professional side, several individuals are responsible for the creation of this book; *How Full Is Your Bucket?* was not simply written by two people. This book is the product of those we have worked with over the years - at Gallup, in academia, and beyond.

Two people in particular have devoted countless days to making this book a reality. Geoff Brewer was a brilliant editor and polisher of words. And Piotrek Juskiewicz worked tirelessly every day to ensure that each part of this book was just right. In addition to being the true "co-creators" of *How Full Is Your Bucket?*, they are both exceptional friends and partners.

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As we worked through several drafts, each of the following people made significant contributions: Vandana Allman, Chip Anderson, Debbie Anstine, Raksha Arora, Kelly Aylward, Maika Bauerle, Cheryl Beamer, Irene Burklund, Jason Carr, Deb Christenson, Julie Clement, Curt Coffman, Barry Conchie, Jon Conradt, Christine Courville, Kirk Cox, Steve Crabtree, Michael Cudaback, Bette Curd, Larry Curd, Tim Dean, Renay Dey, Dan Draus, Eldin Ehrlich, Sherry Ehrlich, Mindy Faith, Peter Flade, Gabriel Gonzalez-Molina, Sandy Graff, Trisha Hall, Jim Harter, Ty Hartman, Sonny Hill, Brian Hittlet, Tim Hodges, Alison Hunter, Mark John, Todd Johnson, Emily Killham, Jim Krieger, Jerry Krueger, Aaron Lamski, Julie Lamski, Steve Liegl, Curt Liesveld, Rosanne Liesveld, Sharon Lutz, Jan Meints, Jacque Merritt, Jan Miller, Brad Mlady, Andy Monnich, Pam Morrison, Gale Muller, Sue Munn, Jacques Murphy, Grant Mussman, Ron Newman, Eric Nielsen, Terry Noel, Matt Norquist, Mary Lou Novak, Steve O'Brien, Eric Olesen, David Osborne, Rod Penner, Mark Pogue, Adam Pressman, Susan Raff, Ashley Rath, Jillene Reimnitz, John Reimnitz, Jason Rohde, Pam Ruhlman, Gary Russell, Robyn Seals, Cheryl Siegman, Gaylene Skorohod, Joe Streur, Ross Thompson, Rosemary Travis, Sarah Van Allen, Martin Walsh, Jason Weber, Kryste Wiedenfeld, John Wood, Al Woods, and Warren Wright.

Finally, we would like to close by thanking the thousands of associates and friends of Gallup who have dedicated their lives to studying, teaching, and believing in what is right. On behalf of Don and myself, we offer our most sincere gratitude for joining us in this lifelong mission.

Gallup Press exists to educate and inform the people who govern, manage, teach, and lead the world's six billion citizens. Each book meets Gallup's requirements of integrity, trust, and independence and is based on Gallup-approved science and research.

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## The Theory of the Dipper and the Bucket

- Each of us has an invisible bucket. It is constantly emptied or filled, depending on our daily interactions with others. When our bucket is full, we feel great. We are productive. We make a positive impact on our workplace. When it is empty, we feel down. We are deflated.
- Each of us also has an invisible dipper. When we do or say things that increase positive emotions in others, we are using that dipper to fill their buckets. Conversely, when we are negative, we are using that dipper to decrease others' positive emotions by dipping from their bucket.
- A full bucket gives us a positive outlook and renewed energy. Every drop in that bucket makes us stronger and more optimistic.
- An empty bucket poisons our outlook, saps our energy, and undermines our will. That's why every time someone dips from our bucket, it hurts us.
- But this works both ways. When we fill others' buckets, our bucket is also filled. And when we dip from others' buckets, our own bucket is emptied in turn. So we face a choice every moment of every day: We can fill one another's buckets, or we can dip from them. It's an important choice - one that profoundly influences our relationships, productivity, health, and happiness.

[image]

## Findings From How Full Is Your Bucket?

- Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist, explains that we experience approximately 20,000 moments every day. That means we have many opportunities to fill others' buckets daily.
- Usually, people remember positive or negative moments, and the neutral moments do not stay in their minds. The optimum ratio to

keep positive and negative moments in balance is 5 positive interactions for every 1 negative interaction.

[image]

[image]

## A Positive Culture in Your

### Workplace and in Your Team

- Leading companies care about positive emotions in the workplace because positive energy can increase employee productivity. Gallup research (explored in How Full Is Your Bucket?) demonstrates that by building recognition and positive emotions, organizations increased employee and organizational engagement and boosted bottom-line performance outcomes.
- A study on recognition, which included more than 10,000 business units and more than 30 industries, showed a direct link between regular recognition and praise and specific business outcomes, like increased individual productivity, higher loyalty and satisfaction scores from customers, better safety records, and fewer accidents on the job.

[image]

### How to Get the Most Out of This Guide

- Discuss the bucket and dipper concepts with your team. Encourage dialogue about each activity. For many people, this may be their first opportunity to think about what fills their buckets or the impact they have on others.
- Make the Theory of the Dipper and the Bucket part of your everyday interactions, not just something you do on isolated occasions. The more people adopt the concepts, the more they will begin to use a common language about positive recognition. The power of that connection will become evident.
- Adapt the activities in this guide to your team.

o These activities can be modified as necessary to make them relevant for your workgroup.

o Rely on the body of *How Full Is Your Bucket?* for more examples and discussion ideas. Everyone on your team should read the book before participating.

[image]

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Five Strategies for Creating a More

Positive Organization

Strategy One: Prevent Bucket Dipping

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[image]

# Strategy One: Prevent Bucket Dipping

What is bucket dipping?

Bucket dipping is when you do or say something to or about someone that is hurtful - or even when you neglect to do something that would have filled someone else's bucket.

How can you prevent bucket dipping in your organization?

- Teach colleagues what bucket dipping is.
- Call attention to bucket dipping and bucket filling.
- Promote ideas about how to fill buckets.
- Reward bucket filling throughout your organization.

[image]

# Strategy One: Prevent Bucket Dipping

What is bucket filling?

It is more than recognition. It involves relationships, time spent in meaningful activity, and providing experiences that help each individual know that he or she matters and that his or her life is meaningful.

It is important to note that people can fill their own buckets and should take responsibility for doing the things that make them feel good or "full." We are at our best when our buckets are full.

What fills one person's bucket is often different than what fills another person's bucket. Make sure you ask each person what fills his or her bucket so your bucket filling is individualized.

[image]

## Examples and Consequences of Bucket

### Dipping and Bucket Filling

Sometimes, we fill others' buckets without even knowing it. Likewise, we can dip out of buckets before we even notice what we've done. This team activity is a great conversation starter for real-life bucket filling and bucket dipping experiences. Use the grid on the next page for this activity.

- Step 1: Individually, write down some specific actions that dip from your personal bucket. Make a note of the consequences in the adjacent box. Then, write down some specific actions that fill your bucket - as well as the consequences.
- Step 2: As a team, discuss real-life examples of bucket dipping and filling, along with the consequences.

Focus: Raising awareness about the notion of positive energy brings the Theory of the Dipper and the Bucket into real life. This activity begins to draw parallels to how we already act and encourages more positive interaction.

[image]

What are the Consequences of Bucket  
Dipping and Bucket Filling?

[image]

[image]

# Strategy Two: Shine a Light



# on What Is Right

## Create Lists of Those Who Did

- Instead of making a list of which employees are causing problems, make a list of those who are making a positive difference.
- Instead of making a list of which employees have not volunteered for some activity, make a list of those who did.

This might take more time and, at first, seem less direct. But the truth is, it gives reinforcement to employees who did something right. The employees who are always on time, helping out across roles, and completing projects above and beyond expectations will be pleased to see themselves recognized. The ones who do not appear on the lists will get the message.

## Write Weekly Thank You Notes

- Things happen every week that deserve a thank you. Noticing and taking the time to say "thank you" is a good habit, and this alone will change the culture of the organization. It may seem simple, and that is the key. If you need help identifying acts that deserve recognition, make notes to yourself throughout the week. Then set aside five minutes on a specific day to write thank you messages.

[image]

# Strategy Two: Shine a Light

# on What Is Right

## Notice What People Do Well

- Take time to count, rank, and measure success. Have individuals set goals and track their own achievements. Find ways to reward and recognize their victories. Maintaining a focus on what is going well will fill buckets throughout the organization.

## Share the Wealth

- Keep an eye out for the bucket fillers in your office. Who is always there to say thank you? Who is your resident cheerleader? Reinforce their goodwill by mirroring their gratitude. If they write notes to others, write a note to them. If they make an effort to say hello to people by name, return the favor. Plugging in to your champions of positive emotion will play to their strength, and the feelings will multiply.

[image]

## Keep Track of Your Success

### Using Gain Scores

#### What is a gain score?

- A gain score is any measurable improvement you have made. It is something you can count, rank, or rate.
- A gain score helps you track improvement over time.
- A gain score helps you measure whether the investments you are making are congruent with your professional and/or organizational goals.

#### Gain score examples:

- Better attendance at team meetings
- Fewer formal complaints brought to the manager's level; employees taking initiative to solve problems

- Improved culture by a measure of increased volunteers for activities
- Increase in unsolicited client compliments
- Increase in the number of deliberate thank you notes you send and/or receive each month

[image]

[image]

[image]

# Strategy Three: Make Best Friends

No, we are not suggesting assigning lifelong buddies. This strategy is about creating an environment that supports and welcomes trusting relationships. Think about the impact best friends have; they are the people you learn from, lean on, and challenge to be better.

Here are some ways to foster a trusting environment:

- Learn the names of everyone you see regularly.
- Take time to sit down and talk with colleagues during lunch or on breaks.
- Discover specific tactics for filling each other's buckets.
- Challenge your colleagues to team trivia -a fun way to get to know more about each other. You can use the Focus on You exercise on the next page.

[image]

## Focus on You

Use this chart to get to know each other on a deeper level. Bring it with you to meetings and other team events. Change some of the questions. Maybe you'll ask about a moment of inspiration, a favorite television program, or a recent success.

[image]

[image]

# Strategy Four: Give Unexpectedly

- Bucket filling doesn't have to be formally scripted or planned. Some of the most memorable bucket filling happens in the fleeting moments when we run into someone spontaneously or when a parent, spouse, or significant other comes home after a long day at work.
- Anyone can fill buckets by recognizing when others have been helpful or have done outstanding work. This positive energy can lead to an entire culture shift, where everyone is noticing and recognizing quality efforts. Suddenly, people look to each other for feedback. As a result, recognition is no longer dependent on the presence of a manager, and it is not limited to official comments on a job performance evaluation. And better, more frequent recognition happens because more people are empowered to do the recognizing. Simply put, positive reinforcement is contagious.

[image]

## Creative Ways to Give Unexpectedly

- Give "drops" or thank you notes for things you notice or appreciate (a sample drop is provided with this guide).
- Give your time. Spend time with someone who has been asking for your help, attention, or advice.
- Give public praise. Find opportunities other than award ceremonies to praise someone in front of others (but be sure the person likes public praise).
- Give by following through on commitments.
- Give by listening carefully and remembering the things that other people say are important to them. Then act on something they mentioned.
- Give others credit for contributions they made to work, activities, or programs.
- Give to the whole. Recognize a team by pointing out the effect that

team members have on others.

- Give what's already given. Shine a spotlight on positive customer comments by posting them where others can see.

[image]

## How to Write a Drop

Drops are handwritten, personal messages written on dropshaped note cards. They're a simple way to share kind words with others, give unexpectedly, and fill someone's bucket.

[image]

Drops that are not deserved dilute the impact of the drops that are deserved. No one enjoys a hollow compliment. Drops allow you to recognize even the smallest contributions or improvements.

Anyone can give a drop as long as it is individual, specific, and deserved. And everyone can and should be responsible for writing drops.

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# Strategy Five: Reverse the Golden Rule

DON'T: Do for others what you would like

DO: Do for others what THEY would like

How you like your bucket filled may be very different from how others like theirs filled. It is important to spend time thinking about yourself, what you like, and what others like. Thinking about the specific kind of recognition you prefer may be a new concept for you - and many people. It may take a bit of discussion to begin exploring these ideas, and it may take a bit of individual reflection as well.

The only way you can be sure you are right about what fills other people's buckets is to ask them. You can certainly watch them and carefully try and decode their behavior, but the only foolproof method is to ask and not assume. Learning about what fills the buckets of the people around you is a powerful way to transform the culture of your team and organization.

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